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A Visit From Mom

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Abstract

She was playing East. I watched calmly as she grounded a pung of dragons. Glancing over at Marshall I remarked on the improvement in her game.

Additional Keywords

Fiction; A Visit From Mom; Dan Perlman

A VISIT FROM MOM

by Dan Perlman

She was playing East. I watched calmly as she grounded a pung of dragons. Glancing over at Marshall I remarked on the improvement in her game.

Marshall looked at me numbly and for the third time in as many minutes remarked on how she'd been dead for fifteen years.

In some households it is not unusual to surprise your mother in the middle of a Mah Jongg game. Marshall did have a point though. It is a bit unsettling to interrupt your mother's ghost and friends in the middle of sorting out their suits, honors, and flowers. It was also a bit difficult to follow the play on a shimmering card table floating four feet above our living room floor.

The ladies, if I may use that term, had not yet noticed us. We edged quietly into the kitchen and put the groceries down. Marshall pointed out for the fourth time that she'd been dead for fifteen years.

Marshall is my best friend and roommate. We've known each other since we were twelve and he stole my idea for a science fair project. I've since forgiven him, especially given that the project, as he produced it, came in last place. We've been through a lot together, and usually I'm the one who gets rattled. Phantasms were apparently outside of his experience. He did seem to be coming a bit unglued.

I opened a couple of sodas and we walked nonchalantly back into the living room. The game was over and our phantom guests were busy packing the tiles

into a small case. I recognized one of them as Mrs. Feldman, who had a heart attack last year. She glanced up and waved. Mom turned around with a startled look on her face. The other three ladies faded from sight, to be followed a moment later by the table. Marshall and I sat down on the couch.

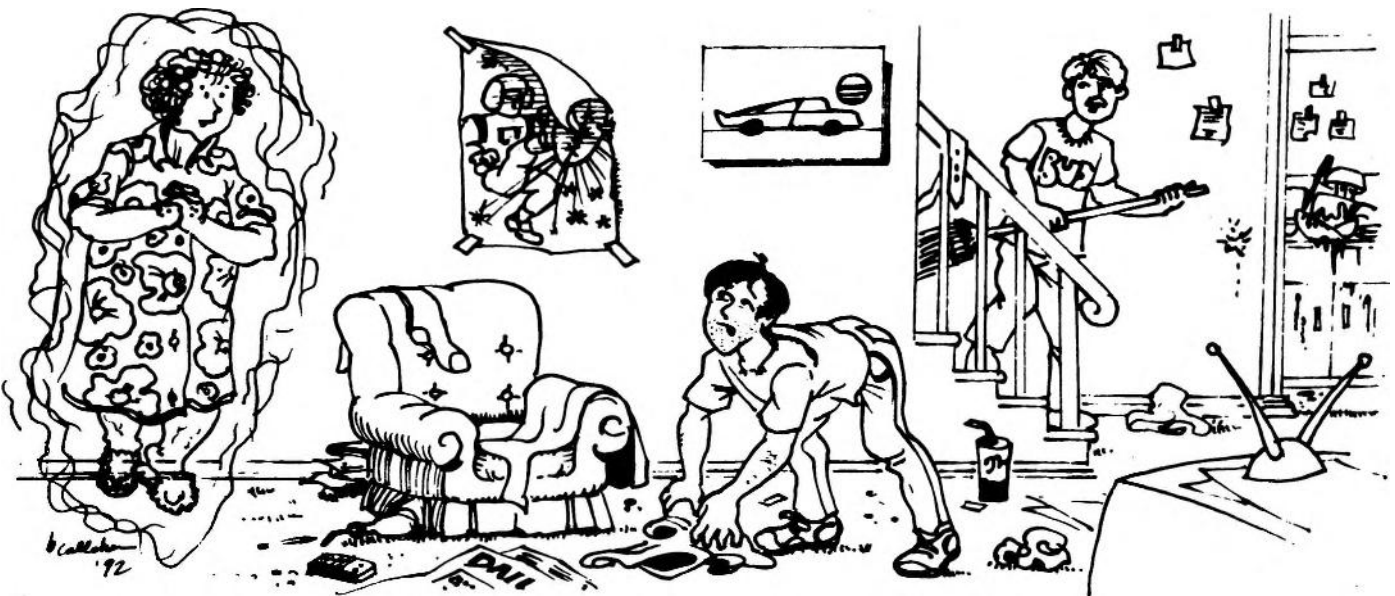
Mom floated across the room and perched on the coffee table in front of us, something she never would have allowed me to do in her house. While she wasn't likely to leave scratches with her shoes, I did wonder momentarily if ghosts actually slime furniture. Ectoplasmic Endust is not one of my stock cleaning solutions. Not that I spend much time cleaning the apartment. Something Mom was sure to notice at any moment.

She looked at us for a few seconds and then sighed silently. Drifting up towards the ceiling she began to circle the room, wrinkles of dismay creasing her face. She floated over to the bookshelf and brushed an ethereal rag ineffectively at the layer of dust. She looked over at us and burst into silent tears. I grabbed an old t-shirt and began feverishly dusting the shelves. Mom brightened considerably.

She continued around the room, flopping her cloth at the furniture. I followed, trying desperately to keep up. Marshall remained on the sofa, sipping his soda.

"Grab the vacuum and start on the floors before she does."

Marshall complied, and for the next hour we



dusted, vacuumed, scrubbed, disinfected, and straightened. Mom fluttered happily through the air. Marshall and I quietly strategized...

"Does she talk?"

"I don't think so."

"Ask her."

"No, you. I'm afraid she might say something that'll make me feel guilty."

"We're cleaning our apartment for the first time in three years and you're worried she'll make you feel guilty?"

"Shut up."

"What do you think she's here for?"

"I don't know. She'll let us know soon; I'm sure of it."

"I'll do the kitchen, you get the bathroom."

Collapsed on the sofa, we appraised the gleaming apartment.

"Where'd your Mom go?"

"Over there, dancing around the plants."

"You want to water them, or should I?"

"Let's both."

Mom hovered as we tended the small window garden. African violets, pansies, and Marshall's single marijuana plant. He says it's on principle, an anti-authoritarian stand from a tenth floor window box. Luckily, Mom appeared to have no idea what it was.

She reached to pat each of us on the head. A slight cool breeze swept through my body; Marshall shuddered. Mom faded slowly from view, smiling as she went. I understand Alice's objection to the Cheshire Cat's method of leave taking. There's something objectionable about a disembodied grin.

We fixed dinner and ate dinner without talking. When I went to my room to get ready for bed there were two quarters on my pillow. My allowance used to be fifty cents. I found Marshall in his room holding two shiny quarters in the palm of his hand.

The apartment stays spotless now, and we have an extra dollar spending money each week. Sometimes I wonder, if I stopped cleaning, would she come back? And if she did; who could take the guilt?

The Mythopoeic Society

Founded in 1967, **The Mythopoeic Society** is an international literary and educational organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams and the genres of myth and fantasy. The Society incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1971 in the State of California.

Membership in the Mythopoeic Society is open to individuals for \$5.00 per year and provides support for the Society; members receive the Annual Report and *Mything Persons*, the membership directory (published biannually), and the opportunity to subscribe to Society publications at reduced members' prices. To join the Society please send your check for \$5.00 for one year (\$10.00 for two years) to: The Mythopoeic Society, P.O. Box 6707, Altadena, CA 91003. Available publications include:

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Since 1970 The Mythopoeic Society has sponsored the annual Mythopoeic Conference known as Mythcon. These conferences generally run from Friday to Monday in July or August.

Mythcon XXIII is *A Long Expected Party*, a special combined event, joining with the (British) Tolkien Society's annual Oxonmoot, for **The J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference**, being held at Keble College, Oxford, from August 17th to August 24th in this, 1992, the centenary of Tolkien's birth. Guests include Christopher Tolkien, Priscilla Tolkien, Tom Shippey, Rayner Unwin, Donald Swann, Rob Inglis, Brian Sibley, and others. For more information please write to Lynn Maudlin, North American Booking Officer, P.O. Box 394, Altadena, CA 91001.

Mythcon XXIV, *Down the Hobbit-hole and Through the Wardrobe: Fantasy in Children's Literature*, will be held July 30th to August 2nd, 1993, at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. The Scholar Guest of honor is Jane Yolen. For membership or more information, please contact Joan Verba, Corresponding Entity, P.O. Box 1363, Minnetonka, MN 55345.

We invite you to join us.